

Lyme and Lyme-like Disease

What is Lyme disease?

Lyme disease is an infectious illness that can be transmitted by the bite of a tick. It is caused by a type of bacteria called *Borrelia burgdorferi*.

What is Lyme-like disease?

Patients in Missouri who have an illness that fits the CDC definition for Lyme disease are diagnosed with Lyme-like disease, because the bacteria *Borrelia burgdorferi* has not been identified in any Missouri cases yet.

What are the symptoms of Lyme disease?

The symptoms of Lyme disease vary from person to person. Usually symptoms appear 3 to 32 days after a tick bite. Early symptoms can include fever, tiredness, headaches, aching joints, nausea and a characteristic skin rash called erythema migrans (EM). This rash occurs in 60-80 percent of Lyme disease cases. It is roughly a circle, and is usually found at the site of the tick bite, although it can appear somewhere else. Over time the rash grows larger and the center often becomes clear (not red).

Late symptoms of Lyme disease may occur weeks to years after being infected and can include severe headaches, stiff neck, weakness or pain in the extremities, facial paralysis, heart problems and arthritis.

How does a person get Lyme disease?

Lyme disease is transmitted through the bite of a tick infected with a type of bacteria called *Borrelia burgdorferi*. Only a small number of ticks carry the bacteria, and the tick has to actually be attached to the person's skin in order to transmit the disease. Deer ticks can carry the disease, and some other ticks may carry it also, but no one knows for sure.

Can Lyme disease be treated?

Yes, once Lyme disease has been diagnosed a physician will prescribe an antibiotic. Prompt treatment can cure the infection and usually prevents complications from occurring later.

How can I protect myself against Lyme disease?

There is currently no vaccine available for Lyme disease. The best prevention is to avoid tick bites.

- Avoid tick-infested areas, especially during the warmer months.
- Wear light-colored clothing so ticks can easily be seen and removed. Wear a long-sleeved shirt, hat and long pants and tuck your pant legs into your socks.
- Walk in the center of trails to avoid overhanging grass and brush.
- Check your body every few hours for ticks when you spend a lot of time outdoors in tick-infested areas. Ticks are most often found on the thigh, arms, underarms and legs or where tight-fitting clothing has been.
- Use insect repellents containing DEET on your skin or permethrin on clothing. **Permethrin should only be used on clothing.** Be sure to follow directions on the container and wash off repellents when going back indoors. Carefully read the manufacturer's label on repellents before using on children.
- Remove attached ticks immediately.

If I am bitten by a tick, what should I do?

- Ticks should be removed promptly and carefully by using tweezers and applying gentle, steady traction.
- Do not crush the tick's body when removing it. Apply the tweezers as close to the skin as possible to avoid leaving tick mouthparts in the skin.
- Do not remove ticks with your bare hands. Protect your hands with gloves, cloth or a tissue. Be sure to wash your hands after removing a tick.
- After removing the tick, disinfect the skin with soap and water or other available disinfectants.
- Watch for unusual symptoms and contact your health care provider if they develop.